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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [LO](#) [POLITICAL REFORM](#)

SUBJECT: Slovakia Political Roundup February 7-27, 2004

¶1. Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

Same Date, Separate Elections

¶2. (SBU) The referendum on early parliamentary elections, though scheduled for the same day as the presidential election, will not be on the same ballot because the referendum requires a different electoral commission and polling station. Speculation that polling places for the two votes could end up across town is likely not true (separate rooms is more probable) but as a result of the separation the cost will be the same as if the elections were held on separate dates. There will still be disincentives for voters, since they will have to wait in two separate lines to vote in both elections. Smer MP Kalinak told poloffs Smer is divided about supporting Rudolf Schuster for re-election; some in the party prefer Ivan Gasparovic. Kalinak added that Foreign Minister Eduard Kukan's closeness to PM Dzurinda, considering coalition troubles and upset over the fast pace of economic reforms, may hurt Kukan at the polls.

OSCE May Want to Monitor Election

¶3. (SBU) OSCE representatives told polec officers that while they are confident in the electoral process, they are considering a monitoring mission because some member states are concerned about the pairing of the presidential election and a referendum on early Parliamentary elections, and about Vladimir Meciar's participation.

Gasparovic: If I Get to Second Round, I Could Win...

¶4. (SBU) Movement for Democracy (HZD) Chairman Ivan Gasparovic told poloffs on February 24 that he expects the first round of presidential elections to be tough, but if he happened to make it to the second round, Gasparovic said he could win. He laments lack of funding and visibility compared to the three candidates ahead of him in the polls, who are in government and appear frequently in the media. He expects support from the six percent of voters who indicate a preference for the Slovak National Party, saying they support Zilina mayor Jan Slota's wing, not that of Peter Sulovsky (whom he called a "nobody"). He rejected the idea that he was allying with extremists and said his Coalition of National Forces will serve to push extremism out of nationally-oriented parties. If Meciar wins, it might be a good thing, Gasparovic said, as Meciar would concentrate on the office, protecting his property, and ensuring his and his children's financial safety, leaving the top post in HZDS open for Gasparovic to claim. In Gasparovic's opinion, the two men have no hope for reconciliation. (Comment: Gasparovic has been somewhat marginalized since his split with Meciar and HZDS before the 2002 election in which his HZD did not make it to Parliament. He has no realistic chance of winning the presidency, but he will have raised his own and his party's profile substantially).

SMK: Closer to a Presidential Choice

¶5. (SBU) Recent press reports indicate the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK) will endorse KDH presidential candidate Frantisek Miklosko, which would boost his chances. (Comment: SMK supporters tend to follow voting recommendations from their party.) If the run-off ends with Meciar and Schuster, SMK Secretary General Peter Voros and Spokeswoman Livia Pokstaller privately told us SMK would support Schuster. They explained that party chair Bela Bugar and others sees the coalition problems as damaging Slovakia's stability and image abroad and discouraging investors. They suggested the current ad-hoc assembly of support for the minority government is not a long-term solution for the coalition troubles.

¶6. (SBU) SMK is very happy about the new Hungarian University in Komarno, which will give opportunities to ethnic Hungarians in southern Slovakia (but it is not

running at full capacity yet). The SMK leaders said Deputy Prime Minister Pal Csaky has been losing influence in SMK lately, is not very capable and is no longer supported by most SMK voters, as was the case in the past election term. But, they were pleasantly surprised by the successful outcome of Csaky's negotiations with KDH Justice Minister Daniel Lipsic that led to Cabinet approval of an anti-discrimination law.

Slovak-Hungarian Agreement on Ethnic Minorities in Force

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17. (SBU) The Slovak-Hungarian agreement on mutual support for ethnic minorities came into effect February 13 after some delays relating to administration of benefits to Slovaks in Hungary. SMK spokesmen publicly opined in January that this would help the Kukan campaign among Hungarian voters. But contacts have told Poloffs there is still friction over the Hungarian Status law, which the GOS feels has extraterritorial and discriminatory elements. The GOS would prefer that the Hungarians address all issues affecting the Hungarian minority in Slovakia through the existing bilateral agreement and reciprocal benefits for minorities in both countries.

Sulovsky's Slovak National Party: We Are Not Extreme

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18. (SBU) Poloffs met with official Slovak National Party (SNS) Chairman Peter Sulovsky and Vice-chairman Viliam Oberhauser to discuss the party's plans and the recent conflict over leadership of the party (a court ruled in Sulovsky's favor, but Zilina mayor Jan Slota still claims to be the party's true leader). Sulovsky is interested in moving away from the radical SNS Slota represents. Sulovsky supports the EU, though cautioning the integration process should be slower; NATO accession is no longer an issue for this SNS. He said the economic reforms are necessary, but the government should have assessed their impact better so as to prevent the current unrest. Sulovsky said the 6 percent of voters who indicate support for SNS in most polls mean his party, not Slota's. He added that his party is more respected abroad and that his concept of a "national party" will become more important in the EU. The SNS perceives the U.S. Republican Party as its ideological ally (as does Gasparovic). SNS has not chosen a presidential candidate to support but is leaning toward Meciar. SNS could work with most other parties, particularly KDH and even SMK, as he said even the Hungarian minority has the same economic concerns as everyone else.

THAYER

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